



HOLY NAME OF JESUS CATHOLIC CHURCH

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Tuesday May 23rd, 2017

Most Reverend Robert Carlson
Archdiocese of St. Louis
20 Archbishop May Drive
Saint Louis, Missouri 63119

Dear Archbishop Carlson,

In February 2017, Holy Name of Jesus Parish began an extensive community-based review process to prepare a report for you on our parish viability since the closing of Our Lady of the Rosary Parish. This report will also update you on the continued use of the church at that location for one weekend Mass in our parish.

This review process focused on the hope expressed in your March 2016 letter to Father Tim Henderson that this consolidation would “*promote a united, vibrant parish carrying forward the mission of the Catholic Church*”. In reporting on our viability, we have tried to utilize the characteristics of “vitality” and “stability” first used in our 2015 parish assessment. We also used the specific conditions given to Father Henderson for the continuing use of the church as a parish worship site.

Enclosed is the report summarizing our work including recommendations for your approval and areas of commitment we hope to focus on during the coming year.

The work of the past few months has been challenging for our parish leaders and for me personally. I truly am most grateful for their hard work, guidance, and support. I believe these recommendations honestly represent our attempt to look for and examine what is working and not working regarding your initial expectations. Envisioning our future and supporting one another continue to be both difficult and necessary disciplines required of us as we move forward.

Personally, I thank you for your trust and prayers. Your care for the work of our Church everywhere, but especially in socio-economically challenged communities, is an encouragement for me and for our parish.

Most sincerely in the Spirit of Jesus Christ,

Father Michael L. Henning, Pastor

Copy: Most Reverend Mark Rivotuso, Auxiliary Bishop
Reverend Michael Boehm, Vicar General

STRATEGIC PLANNING REVIEW & RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ARCHBISHOP ROBERT CARLSON

INTRODUCTION

In 2016, the expressed hope of Archbishop Carlson was that the decision to close and consolidate Our Lady of the Rosary Parish with Holy Name of Jesus Parish and to allow the parish church at that location to be used for one weekend Mass would “*promote a united, vibrant parish carrying forward the mission of the Catholic Church*” within the entire eastern part of North St. Louis County. He also expressed expectations for the parish leaders of Our Lady of the Rosary and stated the specific conditions for the use of the church as a parish worship site.

This report presumes a “*vibrant parish*” is a viable parish. Therefore, we have tried to stay focused on the characteristics and the results of our parish’s 2015 Viability Study. This assessment process frequently noted two key aspects of **viability**: first, the importance of **vitality** (having sufficient staff, parish leaders, and volunteers to sustain the ministries, organizations, and activities needed for a parish to accomplish the work of the Church) and, second, **stability** (practicing good stewardship of our human, financial, and material resources). This report summarizes our review process as well as recommendations and commitments we are making for the future, within the framework of parish viability.

ENGAGING PARISHIONERS & PARISH LEADERS

Communication with Parishioners & Parish Leaders

During the period of March 12th – April 30th extensive information was communicated on 6 separate weekends through the parish bulletin and at parish leadership meetings concerning a review of parish viability and the continuing use of the Chapel of Our Lady.

Interviews & Viability Survey

Pastoral Council members interviewed 23 key parish leaders and volunteers concerning the Archbishop’s expectations. Generally, these interviews revealed a clear divergence of opinion that the consolidation is or is not bringing about a more unified parish.

To date volunteers have taken responsibility for the oversight, maintenance, and use of the Chapel as a parish and school worship site, with some concern expressed regarding the need for additional volunteers. Worship at the Chapel has helped to build some sense of parish community which has been a positive factor for this transition. However, several interviewees expressed the thought that Our Lady of the Rosary Parish “*virtually*” continues to exist. In addition, our pastoral staff and some parish leaders have found it increasingly difficult to sustain our liturgical ministries and some parish activities at two locations. While those interviewed (and all parishioners) are aware that contributions supporting the use of the Chapel have been more than sufficient, some encouraged a stronger focus on stewardship especially in light of our parish’s current budget deficit (\$78,840, March 2017).

In addition, all parishioners and parish leaders were invited to respond to a survey concerning parish viability and their experience of parish life since July 2016. Eighty (80) surveys were returned representing 16.5% of our average total weekend Mass attendance (486) and 4.6% of our total number of registered parishioners (1,728). Of the 70 respondents, most interested in parish viability, 33% are already now committed and encouraging others to be active members and 57% either want to or now participate in parish life.

Generally, respondents’ written comments were positive regarding the warmth of welcome and experience of hospitality as well as the continuing use of the Chapel as a parish and school worship site. While some sense of community has been developing, concerns were expressed that the parish consolidation has not significantly resulted in more parish leaders or volunteers nor increased participation in parish life and activities. Some also think that using the Chapel as a parish worship site has been divisive and not good stewardship of our resources.

Town Hall Meeting

In late March, all parishioners were also invited to more publicly share their experience of parish life during the past 9 months; to make parish leaders aware of their commitment to sustaining parish viability and the work of the Church in our community; and to express their hopes and concerns for the future. Approximately 60 – 70 parishioners were in attendance, including 15 parish leaders. Generally, those present expressed their positive experiences and hopes for the future. Greater attention could have been given to better preparation for this meeting, the sharing of information later published in the bulletin, and to eliciting the questions and concerns which afterwards were expressed by some in attendance.

Assembly of Parish Leaders

Finally, on May 1st the members of our Pastoral Leadership Team, our Parish Pastoral Council, and our Parish Finance Committee assembled to discuss and finalize a response to Archbishop Carlson regarding his expectations concerning Holy Name of Jesus Parish. The agenda for this meeting was developed by a small group of leaders convened by Father Mike several days before the Assembly. Everyone also received supplemental materials detailing the work accomplished in the review process and concerning parish finances. The outcomes of this meeting are reported in the following sections.

On May 3rd, the Pastoral Leadership Team discussed and affirmed in the majority a proposal from Father Mike concerning the framework and timeline for the implementation of the recommendations and commitments outlined below.

EVIDENCE OF VIABILITY: STRENGTHS (ASSETS) & WEAKNESSES (DEFICITS)

Concerning the Archbishop's expectations for our becoming a more united vibrant parish carrying forward the mission of the Church and for the continuing use of the Chapel as a parish worship site, our Assembly of Parish Leaders focused on identifying and discussing two things: What is working? What is not working?

Concerning the Viability of Our Parish

What Is Working

- Parish liturgies are vibrant, encouraging full, active, and conscious participation
- Parishioners have a stronger, growing sense of community
- External partnerships are developing, enabling stronger community outreach to those in need
- Our parish and school continue to fulfill our Church's "ministry of presence" in North County

What Is Not Working

- Recruitment, formation, and support of parish volunteers and leaders
- Strain on parish personnel – pastoral staff; parish leaders and volunteers
- Fewer than expected ministry and organizational leaders and volunteers joining the parish
- Unused or underutilized parish facilities pose a liability to parish finances and viability
- Stewardship initiatives in support of a balanced parish budget including –
 - Planning for current liabilities for school operating expenses and capital improvements (Projected \$30,000 - \$85,000 unbudgeted expense for the current fiscal year)
 - Planning for and scheduling parish capital improvements
 - Reviewing and reorganizing parish staffing
 - Increasing Sunday offerings and developing new revenue sources
- Still developing the evangelization and outreach sense of our parish identity

Concerning the Continuing Use of the Chapel as a Parish Worship Site

What Is Working

- There has been adequate financial support for operation of the Chapel as a parish worship site
- Sunday Mass attendance at the Chapel has been good
- The Chapel – especially bathrooms – addresses the accessibility needs of those in need
- The Chapel – though at a distance from the school – functions well as a school worship site

What Is Not Working

- Unused (rectory) or underutilized parish facilities pose a liability to parish finances and viability
- Strain on parish personnel – pastoral staff; parish leaders and volunteers
- The Chapel hinders unity for those who consider it to be “virtually” Our Lady of the Rosary Parish
- The Chapel’s distance from the school makes a worship space unavailable in bad weather

RECOMMENDATIONS & COMMITMENTS

The Assembly of Parish Leaders met for 3 hours to discuss the work and outcomes of the review process as well as supplemental materials. The following statement was developed during this meeting:

Holy Name of Jesus will remain viable as a parish with a full-time pastor for the next 10 years, if we continue to develop and sustain a focus on stewardship and mission. In light of this we will consolidate our worship site to the parish church on Ashbrook Drive.

The last 60 – 90 minutes of the meeting was devoted entirely to the wording and refining of this statement as well as attempting to reach consensus. The Assembly honestly tried but was not able to reach consensus. Those present were given two options: (1) let Father Mike decide the issue or (2) support Father Mike to decide the issue by inviting those present to indicate whether they could support the statement or not. The group chose the second option, with 8 members supporting this statement, 6 choosing not to support the statement.

Requests for Archbishop Carlson’s Support & for Parish Commitment

I believe there has been value to using of the Chapel as a worship space for our parish. To this point in time, this decision has been of some help in retaining members and has given some the opportunity of experiencing a new parish identity and mission. Though many chose not to become registered members of Holy Name of Jesus Parish, this decision did help us begin this transition in a way that was helpful.

However, prior to July 1st, 2016, during the time transition planning, the issue of stewardship of resources was seriously raised in a meeting of parish leaders and parishioners. The momentary attention given to the issues seemed to affirm its value and importance as did the evident respect for the person honestly raising it up for consideration.

I believe that my experience since March 2016, our parish experience since July 2016, and the work of this review confirms the validity of the Assembly’s statement above. Our experience of the past year confirms our potential as a viable parish for the future. We need to sustain the progress we have made and now focus more on stewardship and mission. Therefore, having consulted with our Pastoral Leadership Team to develop these recommendations and having asked our parish leaders to review them, I am requesting the approval of the Archbishop and the support of our parish leaders and community.

Request for Approval and Support from Archbishop Carlson

I recommend continuing to use the Chapel for Sunday Mass through November 26th, 2017, the Feast of Christ the King. Our weekend liturgies are one of the strongest characteristics of our parish viability and will always remain a priority as we now develop a new emphasis on the stewardship of our human, material, and financial resources as a parish.

I recommend continuing to use the Chapel for School Liturgies through June 1st, 2017. Our parish is now and will continue to be committed to the mission of Catholic education in North County, the presence of Catholic schools in our Deanery, and the collaborative work of the Federation of Catholic Schools we have been a part of since 2010. During the coming year, our parish will actively participate in the work of the School Oversight Committee as they review the possibility of our school becoming an Archdiocesan Elementary School.

Request for the Commitment and Support from Our Parish Community

The future of our parish depends on the commitment of our parishioners to our viability and mission. I have already asked our parish leaders to begin to identify and develop concrete goals and action steps addressing the needs we have as a Catholic faith community. An asterisk (*) indicates goals for which we have already identified a leader willing to take responsibility for developing and implementing.

Liturgy & Worship

- Organize and support volunteers for worship at the Chapel through June 2017

Community

- Review, plan, and implement parish church renovations addressing accessibility needs (*)
- Organize a telephone campaign to assist parishioners and get them back to church and activities
- Organize and maintain a comprehensive communication plan for parish life and activities

Service & Outreach

- Recruit, form, and support new volunteers for the work of the St. Vincent de Paul Society (*)
- Review and reorganize parish staffing and pastoral leadership in support of parish viability (*)

Gospel Values

- Stewardship: Increase Sunday offertory revenues by 6 – 10% during the 2017-2018 fiscal year
- Evangelization: Research, plan, and implement an outreach initiative to non-parishioners

Rev. Michael L. Henning, Pastor

Date